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THE PROPOSED U.S. MISSILE DEFENSE FOR EUROPE AND THE OLD CONTINENT'S REACTION

Aleksandra Lencznarowicz

DRAWING AN IMAGE OF THE IDEA

The United States and European Union enjoy a complex and complicated relationship, its dynamics so aptly expressed in Kagan's words: "Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus."¹ Despite sometimes tumultuous transatlantic relations, the United States is steadfastly committed to maintaining peace and stability on European continent. This paper addresses the question why the proposed deployment of the U.S. missile defense shield in Europe was met with mixed reactions, and argues that it represents the deeper divisions within European Union, underscoring the different relationships between the United States and the Old Europe, as opposed to the new E.U. members.

The security aspect of the transatlantic alliance is perhaps the most important one, and the case of the missile defense constitutes a test for how the partners on both continents are able to cope with their differences, and whether they are able to come to a constructive agreement without fracturing the Atlantic community. Moreover, the issue offers an excellent opportunity to gain the insight into motivations and methods of nations that, while divided by their historical experiences and current interests, are struggling to chart a common policy. The process of forging a unified course presents an opportunity for other nations to observe and draw the lessons for their own endeavors.

Drawing upon the current exchange of ideas on the subject, the paper evaluates one of the more controversial U.S. defense initiatives since WWII, as an integral part of the American security strategy. Moreover, it examines the United States' rational and the particulars of the proposed missile defense system and further, attempts to present the Europe's division on the issue. Employing the relevant statistical data, as well as the opinion polls and surveys, the research shows the perceptions of the societies and governments involved. The project strives to combine and present the views expressed in the literature on the missile defense from both sides of the Atlantic. As majority of the works on the subject examine the actions of main actors, this paper delves into their motivations. The goal of the research is not to advocate for any one side of this issue, but rather to expose the roots of Europe's diverse reaction, and present its implications for the transatlantic relations.

DELVING INTO THE MISSILE DEFENSE CONCEPT

The American Perspective

In order to properly analyze the United States' proposed missile defense initiative, it has to be viewed in the context of its general commitment to the security of Europe. Partly from common cultural bonds, partly from political consideration and extensive trade, the U.S. entered two World Wars to return Europe to peace. The sheer importance of the continent became a spark for the Cold War with the Soviet Union, where the United States found itself firmly committed to European allies, the position subsequently formalized by signing the NATO agreement.² The obligations U.S. took upon itself to protect free Europe and prevent future conflicts between European nations, has led American strategists to the logical conclusion that the ballistic missiles pose a serious threat, which the United States and Europe ought to be able to repel.³

What is a missile defense shield? In the broadest terms, it is a defensive system charged with intercepting incoming enemy missiles. The origins of the current missile defense may be found in, albeit much more ambitious, plans to deploy Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in the 1980s.⁴ Much of the research and development that went into it, was used to create the current scaled down version of the Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS).⁵ The United States argues that the missile defense is necessary, since the proliferation of the ballistic missiles makes the threat ever more real. Moreover, these weapons are found in the hands of multiple states and perhaps organizations, making them more difficult to deter. To illustrate the spread of these weapons one may consider the statistical data published by the Department of Defense that shows that in 1972 only nine states possessed ballistic missiles, in 1990, as the Cold War was drawing to a close, the number went up to 16, and by the end of 2006, the number increased to 25 states.⁶

The United States views the missile defense as a necessary component for its own and Europe's security. This is dictated not only by ballistic missile proliferation, but also by the international security environment, that is more complex and less predictable than bipolar world of the Cold War.⁷ While these weapons could not destroy Europe (unless armed with nuclear warheads) by posing a constant psychological threat they could become a source of intimidation aimed at population centers of the continent. The United States is not alone in identifying the wide spread of ballistic missiles as a clear danger to its security. Underscoring the international consensus regarding the missile threat, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stated after the North Atlantic Council meeting in Brussels, "There is absolutely a shared threat perception. Allies all agree a threat from ballistic missiles exists."⁸

While these weapons may have multitude of sources, of particular concern are the ballistic missile development and testing programs underway in North Korea and Iran, and their related proliferation activities, with Iran being the potential direct threat to Europe.⁹ As far as North Korea is concerned, the threat it poses to Europe is an indirect one, through proliferation of the nuclear and missile technology to countries such as Iran. Moreover, what makes North Korea such a danger is the personality of its leader Kim Jong-il and his unpredictability.¹⁰ Iran, on the other hand, has a system of government, in which decision making process is divided between religious leadership and civilian officials, making its motivation difficult to decipher for the West. Furthermore, Iran has been receiving a great deal of technical assistance from countries such as Russia and China, as well as before

mentioned North Korea that shared its No Dong missile technology, and helped in development of Iran's newest Shahab-3 rocket.¹¹ This weapon, while still in the development, would have a 2000 km range and could reach most of the European cities.¹² One view is that Iran's sponsoring of Hezbollah and Hamas might lead to sharing its missile technology with its surrogates, a potentially destabilizing development, and one that would not be deterred by a simple surety of retaliation.¹³

While the threat coming from Teheran is being used recently to explain the urgency for implementation of the system, from U.S. perspective the missile shield would provide an enhanced deterrence and freedom from intimidation for years to come, regardless of who the potential enemy might be.¹⁴ There is also an added benefit affecting directly U.S. security, the proposed defensive shield over Europe would offer an improved capability to defend the United States against potential ballistic missile attack from the Middle East. It would also offer additional capability to deal with the threat, beside an offensive retaliation or military preemption. Moreover, the shield would undermine military usefulness of such missiles, and may dissuade potentially hostile states from indigenous development, or foreign acquisition of these weapons in the first place.¹⁵ If this result is achieved, it would satisfy directly the United States and European nonproliferation goals.

The Particulars of the System

The proposed ballistic missile shield would be an integrated system with BMDS currently deployed to protect North America. As such, it would utilize command and control, as well as early detection sensors and other assets already in existence. The two additional installations necessary for an implementation of the defense shield over Europe are: the X-band midcourse radar that is proposed to be located in the Czech Republic, and the interceptor site destined to be situated in Poland. The installation in the Czech Republic would provide vital data to the overall functioning of the system. The information obtained will be used to identify and distinguish the missile warhead from other missile parts (such as separated booster rockets) and potential countermeasures (decoys etc.), but most importantly, it will be used to guide interceptors to the projected trajectory of the ballistic missile warhead.¹⁶ The site proposed to be located in Poland would consist of ten interceptors, similar to the ones currently deployed in Alaska and California; however, they would be a two staged variant that is quicker, lighter, and better suited for the engagement ranges and timelines in Europe.¹⁷ These ground-based interceptors are designed for defensive purposes only and employ small exoatmospheric hit-to-kill vehicles (EKV).¹⁸ Any modifications to this platform to transform it into an offensive weapon would require the extensive, lengthy, and costly changes that would be clearly visible to any observer. The above mentioned assets could also become the core of the envisioned by NATO Active Layered Theater Ballistic Missile Defense (ALTBMD) program, to ensure coverage for all European nations requiring such protection.¹⁹

Possible Scenario

The typical envisioned scenario for the missile defense in Europe would perhaps play itself in this fashion: a thermo bloom is detected by the U.S. satellite asset signaling to the command and control center a missile launch, its size and heat signature, verifying that it is an Iranian Shahab-3 rocket, being launched from the area known to be a terrorist stronghold. In the first few seconds of the flight it is determined that it is a three stage, solid propellant variant and that its initial projected course will take it to the center of Vienna,

Austria. The command and control support composed of a network of computers and communications equipment, part of the larger U.S. command and control system (BMDS), transmits and receives data on this threatening missile launch. The flight profile and projected target enable military leaders to determine the optimum time and place to launch the kill vehicles. The system is designed to rapidly provide a wide range of information to decision makers, because of the short distances in Europe and the great speed of ballistic missiles that require threat assessment and interceptor launch decisions in just minutes. The political leadership makes a snap decision to intercept. The midcourse radar site in the Czech Republic, already alerted and tracking the target, goes from standby to active acquisition of an inbound and relays relevant data to the Polish interceptor site, which launches at an optimum moment. In the meantime command and control center notifies all the interested parties, including Russian military command that an intercept is currently taking place. As the EKV closes on the Iranian missile and subsequently destroys it, everybody takes a sigh of relief. While this scenario has not yet taken place, it serves as an illustration of how vital this installation can be. Currently, without the shield in place and operational, the only option the leadership could weigh is the retaliatory attack on the source. If the point of the launch was located in the midst of the urban area, it is doubtful such decision would be made, not to mention the relative value of destroying the city for the act of the few.

Old Continent's Position

What has been Old Continent's reaction to the American proposal? The concept of U.S. installations sparked a heated debate in Europe. This controversy brought to light how fickle the consensus within the continent is on security and defense issues, as well as underscored the difference in relationships between Old and New Europe with the United States. There seemed to be three major points of contention with the American plan.

First, some European countries argue that the proposed system implemented through bilateral agreements between United States, Poland and the Czech Republic has no provisions for encompassing NATO structures, and that the core principal of the collective defense may be undermined. They would like to see the matter of missile defense discussed as a NATO issue. The policy of the United States in this respect is seen as the continuation of the unilateral stands U.S. has been pursuing following the attacks of 9/11. Americans seem to be interested more in the results than in the process, the latter being central to European sensibilities. The United States appears to be taking an easy road that offers best chances for the success of its policies, without stepping into quagmire of the negotiations with Old Continents' many nations with so diverse interests, while Europe sees the overt lack of consultations on matters directly affecting Europe's security as insulting.²⁰ The proponents of the American initiative note that to bring the matter to the forum where agreement by all is necessary, the successful passage of the concept is unlikely in the extreme, since various European states attach a very different importance to the threat posed by the ballistic missiles.²¹ Furthermore, it is worth noting that the missile defense is not something Europe is prepared, nor has technical capability to provide for itself.

Second concern refers to an alleged threat coming from Iran. Even the supporters of the deployment of the shield agree for the most part, that Teheran does not pose a clear and present danger to their countries at this time. Further, European influence in the Middle East might actually diminish if Europe is perceived to be pursuing American strategy.

Moreover, some argue that faced with nuclear tipped Iranian missiles aimed at Paris or Berlin, Europe could hardly be unfazed, depending on reliability of the missile defense shield, the technology that can not be 100% accurate all of the time.²² This is contradicted by the argument that this system can not be justified or denied existence based solely on current threats, since it takes years to build and it will continue to serve well into the future against all enemies.

The third point of the disagreement, and the source of a major European opposition, is the stance of Russia. As former Russian President Putin rattled his sabers complaining about the West's incursion into his sphere of influence, and threatening to abrogate the treaty on Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF), which bans nuclear tipped medium ranged missile systems, some European countries, most notably Germany, seems to acquiesce.²³ Noteworthy is the objection voiced by the neorealist scholar Waltz, who believes that such systems are inherently destabilizing, further perpetuating undesirable unipolar World order, and capable of igniting aggressive arms races, since the best perceived way to overcome missile defense, is to saturate it with greater amount of warheads.²⁴ The United States rejects the Moscow's rhetoric, responding that it is an undeniable fact that proposed missile defense would not affect the Russian nuclear deterrence. The ICBMs are far beyond the capability of the system to intercept, and moreover, most of them would not even overfly Europe on the way to North America. Regardless of these facts, Russia used the proposed shield to explain away recent increases in the defense spending, as well as possible cancellation of the INF treaty. The hawks are pointing out however, that the efforts to halt the erosion of the Russian sphere of influence are precisely the reasons why continuing and direct U.S. engagement in Europe is so necessary. It is also extremely insulting to the sovereign nations, such as Poland or Czech Republic, to be still considered belonging to that sphere.²⁵

From the Vantage Point of the Old Europe

The American proposal is generally viewed with the high degree of skepticism by the continental Europe. This reflects not only the objections to the merit of the installation, but perhaps more so, to the unilateral way the United States seem to be pursuing its objectives. As the national goals for the major European players vary, so do the reasons for resisting the U.S. plans. Historically countries such as France led more independent security policy and were reluctant to accept U.S. initiatives, striving not to become dependent on America for their defense. As an example may serve France's exiting from the military NATO structures in 1966.²⁶ Therefore France strongly opposed the concept of the American missile shield.²⁷ Germany, which during the heat of this controversy held the presidency of the E.U. and tried to find the balance for the countries on both sides of the issue, generally opposed the concept of the missile defense, based on the premise that it may spark a new arms race with Russia, as well as unnecessarily antagonize this major supplier of energy to the European Union.²⁸ Indeed Germany's recent policy towards Russia that reflects its bilateral energy deals, can be viewed as extremely accommodating to the point of the appeasement. United Kingdom, certainly a member of the Old Europe, and the traditional ally of the United States, has been often conducting a policy that was not always in line with the rest of Europe, being more receptive to the American arguments, and even favored the deployment of the system within its borders.²⁹

Through the Eyes of the New Europe

On the other side of the issue stood New Europe, represented by Poland and the
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Czech Republic, who actively lobbied to have the missile defense sites located on their territories. This area coincided with, what was determined by the United States to be the perfect geographical location for the installations. However, to gain a clearer understanding of the motivations for the New Europe's position on this issue, it is necessary to consider its historical experiences that had a direct bearing on its perceptions of potential threats and their origins. The failure of the Western European allies to come to their effective aid at the inception of WWII as promised in the treaties, and subsequent abandonment of the region to the Soviet sphere of influence, are still vivid in the memories of Poles and Czechs. This area was also invaded and/or occupied by Russia; in case of the Czech Republic during the latter part of the XX century, while Poland suffered territorial occupation, as well as systemic political and cultural exploitation dating back to the XVIII century, casting the shadow on the future relations between Moscow and the Central European nations.³⁰

Despite decreasing popular support for some American policies, a majority of Polish and Czechs citizens consider continuing United States' engagement in Europe as vital to the region's security, perceiving America as the only country that can ultimately guarantee their safety.³¹ While missile defense shield would ostensibly protect Europe from the threat of Iranian missiles, both Poles and Czechs understand and appreciate its long term stabilizing effects, through added security against all enemies and potential threats. The statistical data indicates that neither Poles, nor Czechs see Iran as an imminent threat, rather it is broadly understood security of their country, and Europe respectively, that is at the heart of their decision to support the system.³² Russia's aggressive rhetoric in the opposition to the deployment of the missile shield adds significantly to the support of the American initiative. The sentiment of the Central European nations is well represented in the quote of the former deputy Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Alexander Vondra, who stated that: "For us in the Czech Republic with our location between Germany and Russia, to have an installation with a few American soldiers is a good thing."³³ While both governments of Poland and the Czech Republic generally support U.S. installations, the popular sentiment is mixed and demographically diversified. The most noticeable divergence between the two countries is the apparent fracture between governments' positions and popular support. The Czech government steadfastly promotes the American installation within the Republic, while the population's position is a bit more cautious. In Poland this trend is reversed, with the population leading the pro arguments.³⁴

European Union's Position

The European Union is in the process of combining members' views on foreign and security policies to present a unified front through its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).³⁵ This second pillar of the European Union is far from completion and the general position of the E.U. on the issue of security, was summarized in the statement of Javier Solana, the Secretary-General of the Council, in his speech to the European Parliament in the spring of 2007: "On security matters, the treaties in force allocate sovereignty to EU member states, but that sovereignty must be compatible with the union's general interest in security."³⁶ This statement emphasizes the fact that the European Union does not have a cohesive security policy at this time, and these decisions default to the national governments. However, the restrictions on these individual policies placed by the European Union so as not to compromise the good of the whole, may be seen as the initial steps of the E.U. closer cooperation in the matters of security. Subsequently, during U.S.-E.U.

summit, at the end of April 2007, The United States and Europe have agreed in principal on usefulness of such a system; however, many differences remain to be reconciled. The new European Union reform treaty leaves ultimately such issues up to the individual member states.³⁷

Europe's Dynamic Position

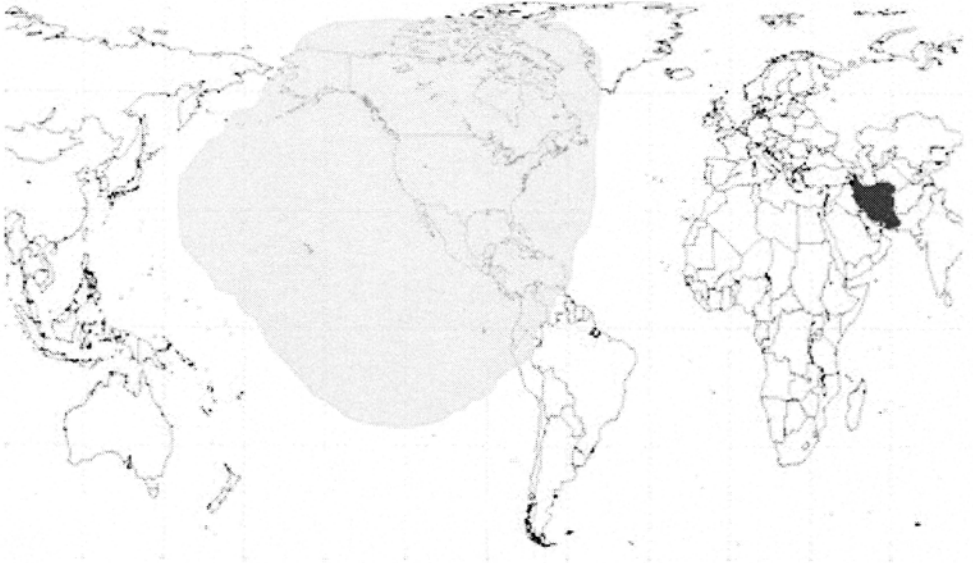
Europe's position on the matter of placing missile shield by the U.S. within the E.U. is a dynamically evolving situation that is being affected by the democratic processes within all interested parties. As an example, the 2007 November elections in Poland resulted in the formation of the new government that favors closer consultations with the E.U. to seek broader consensus before proceeding with the project. Behind Warsaw's hesitation may lay the perceived weakness of the American administration during its last few months in power.³⁸ At the same time, the pendulum of support swung in the other direction in countries such as France, where President Sarkozy seems to lead considerably less adversarial policy toward the United States and its plans in Europe, emphasizing the Iranian threat.³⁹ The degree and the source of support for the American plans are also shifting and evolving within the New Europe, where there seem to be the slight disconnect between the populations and their governments. In the United States the Congress, led now by the Democrat Party, has for a time withheld funding for the project, sending mixed signals to the countries and governments that have invested their reputations and hopes in the implementation of the system.⁴⁰ The United States, while undergoing its election cycle, is focused internally and the uncertainty of the presidential succession adds to the anxiety of its new European allies.

Implications for Transatlantic Relations

In conclusion, the support and the opposition to the proposed U.S. defense initiative appears to follow the more pronounced fault lines between the Old and the New Europe. It represents the different geopolitical positions, historical experiences, common sentiments and myths of the populations expressed through the democratic process in the dynamically changing positions of the respective governments. Whether the two parts of Europe are merging or drifting apart, and if the United States helps to unite, or separate the transatlantic community, will be essential to all concerned. As European Union's specialist Hix notes: "When the interest of the states diverge the EU becomes incapacitated and the member states pursue their interest independently of the EU."⁴¹

The proposed U.S. missile defense shield for Europe promises to be able to bring multitude of benefits; however, it is burdened with serious objections, voiced on both sides of the Atlantic. The possibility of the renewed arms race with Russia, the erosion of the cohesiveness of NATO, and lack of the credible missile threat, are all serious concerns necessitating further debate and careful consideration before proceeding with the implementation of this strategy. Summarizing the benefits of the initiative, the capability to extend defensive coverage to Europe against long-range ballistic missiles, which would enhance the collective security of the NATO Alliance, strengthen transatlantic unity, reaffirm America's commitments to European security, and avoid the decoupling of Washington and Brussels security interests, would be indeed a welcomed development. Moreover, the issue also represents a crucial element in the U.S.-E.U. relations, and if resolved to a mutual benefit, it may further cement the transatlantic bond. The question whether this initiative would fulfill U.S. goals and become a successful strategy in defending

Europe remains to be answered, the future shape of the World may depend on it.



APPENDIX

Figure 1. Current Defensive Coverage Against Long Range Missiles

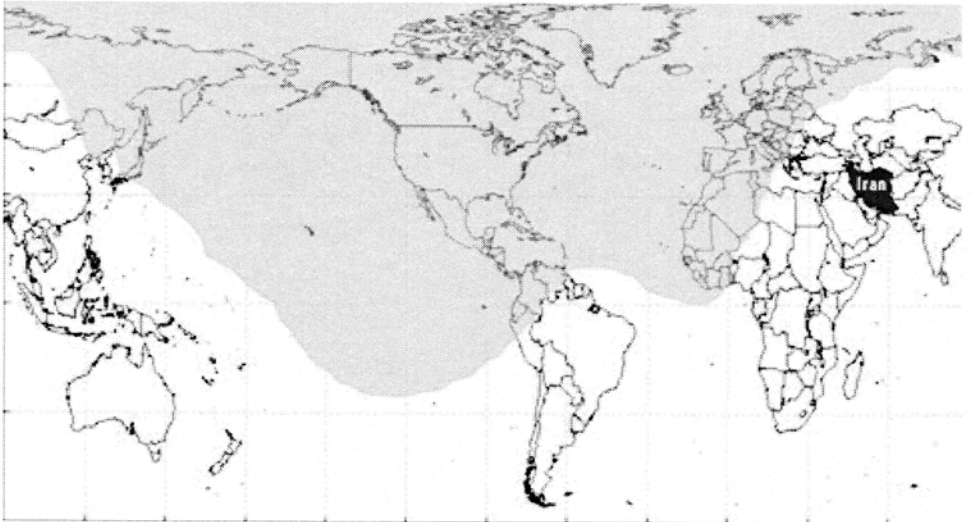


Figure 2. Defense Coverage Proposed by the United States

Source: Missile Defense Agency, 07-MDA-2321

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